

# Worksession

<b>Agenda Item #</b>	4
<b>Meeting Date</b>	1 May 2006
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<b>Approved By</b>	Suzanne Ludlow Community and Government Liaison

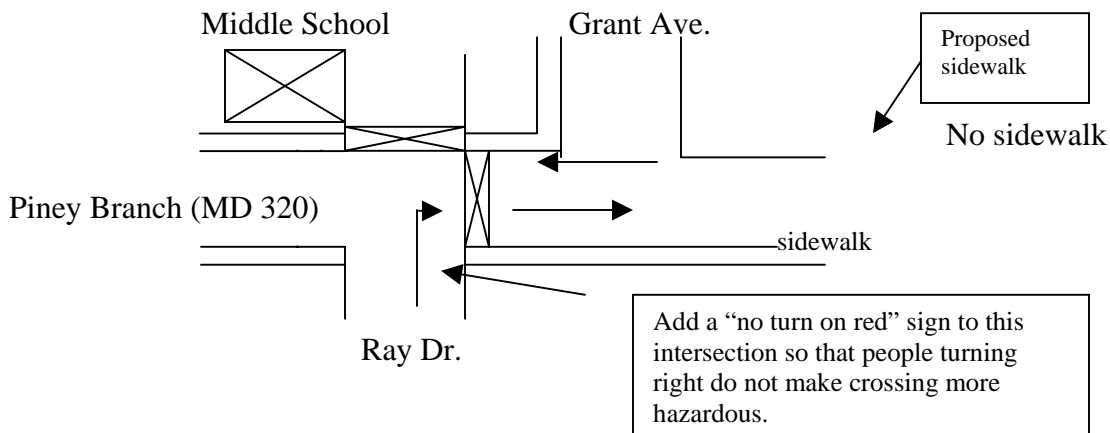
<b>Discussion Item</b>	Report on Walkable Communities Workshops
<b>Background</b>	<p>Bob Chauncy of the National Center for Bicycling and Walking held a series of pedestrian safety workshops in October 2005. The Report on these workshops covers the recommendations made by participants from the community and City staff and the ideas were developed in support of the pedestrian safety recommendations made by Dan Burden in 2002.</p> <p>The workshops were held in four areas: Piney Branch Road, Takoma Junction, Flower Avenue, and Takoma Langley Crossroads. The report includes action steps which correspond to the recommendations developed during the workshops for each area. They are intended to provide guidance to the Council in future policy decisions and requests for pedestrian safety changes.</p>
<b>Policy</b>	<p>“Accommodate local and regional traffic, while providing safe, pleasant, and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access to places people want to go.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Takoma Park Master Plan</i></p>
<b>Fiscal Impact</b>	Will vary depending on the specific action step(s) undertaken by the City.
<b>Attachments</b>	Report on the Walkable Communities Workshops (October 2005)
<b>Recommendation</b>	Review recommendations and action steps of the Report.
<b>Special Consideration</b>	

In late October of 2005, Bob Chauncy of the National Center for Bicycling and Walking held a series of pedestrian safety workshops. The Walkable Community Workshops were attended by government officials and residents and covered sections of Piney Branch Road, Flower Avenue, Langley Park, and Takoma Junction. Bob Chauncy led the participants in identifying pedestrian safety problems and determining possible steps towards solving these problems.

The workshops produced a list of short and long-term recommendations through the participants brainstorming. This report describes the context for each workshop, lists the community identified issues, and recommends improvements and programs to resolve the issues and improve pedestrian safety and walkability.

## I. Piney Branch Road

Piney Branch Road (MD 320) is a 30-mph State Highway that runs in front of Takoma Park Middle School and along a residential area of Takoma Park. There are many pedestrians in this area and in Montgomery County middle school students within a 1.5 mile radius are not provided with bus service to school. The school also hosts community events on weekends. While the street is mainly residential, traffic is heavy and often travels above the speed limit. Currently, Piney Branch has no sidewalk on the school side between Philadelphia Avenue (MD 410) and the school. There is also concern about pedestrian safety because of cars turning quickly onto and from Piney Branch and crosswalks without pedestrian signals or incorrectly timed signals. The sidewalk near the elementary school, while adequate, is not shaded and the landscape buffer between it and the road is narrow.



**1. Issue:** The crosswalk on Piney Branch is dangerous because of speeding vehicles and vehicles turning right onto Piney Branch from Ray Drive.

**Recommendation:**

- Add a “no turn on red” sign on Ray Drive at the Piney Branch intersection.

**Action Step:**

- Write a letter requesting this change to the State Highway Administration (SHA).

**2. Issue:** There is a long wait time for the pedestrian signal countdowns in front of the school and the light does not provide enough time for crossings.

**Recommendations:**

- Re-evaluate the timing and length of pedestrian signals.
- Install Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) with on-demand buttons to allow people to stop traffic only when necessary. This would also be helpful for children who stay for after-school activities past the 3 pm crossing guard shift.

**Action Step:**

- Write a letter requesting a signal re-evaluation and possible APS installation to SHA.

**3. Issue:** There is no sidewalk on a portion of Piney Branch close to the school between Grant and Philadelphia. Building a sidewalk would require a retaining wall and SHA does not fund retaining walls from the sidewalk retrofit fund. Participants noted that the city recently built a retaining wall on Grant Avenue to facilitate the construction of a sidewalk adjacent to the school.

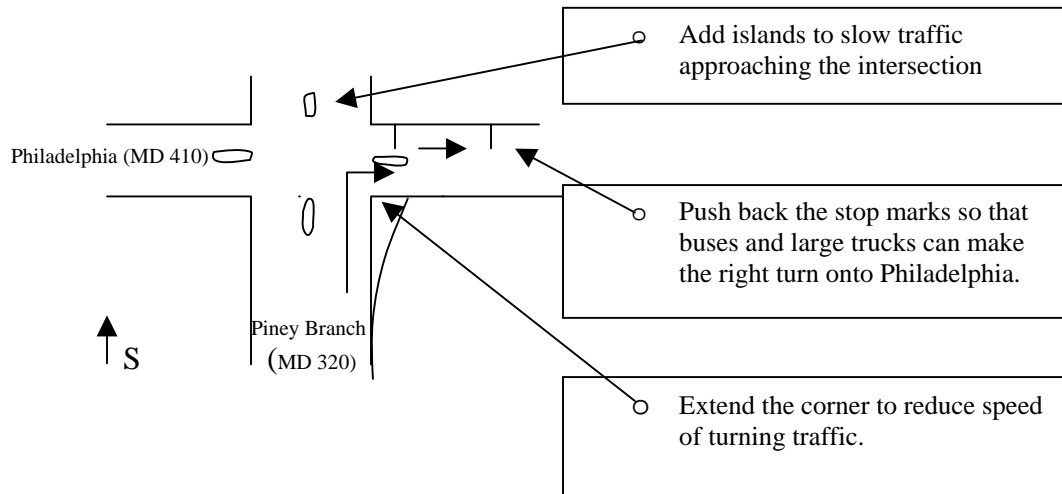
**Recommendation:**

- Install a sidewalk by narrowing the lanes on Piney Branch and/or obtaining right-of-way from the adjacent property owners. Installation would include tree removal and a retaining wall because of the existing sloped wooded area.

**Action Step:**

- Request funding from a variety of sources including the Office of Highway Safety’s Safe Routes to Schools program. The City may need to explore options for ‘non-highway’ funds for the retaining wall.

## Piney Branch and Philadelphia



**4. Issue:** Crossing signals at Piney Branch and Philadelphia are not ADA compliant.

### Recommendation:

- Install Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS)

### Action Step:

- Write a letter request to SHA.

**5. Issue:** Crossing Philadelphia and Piney Branch is dangerous because of the fast right turning cars traveling south from Piney Branch turning northbound onto Philadelphia.

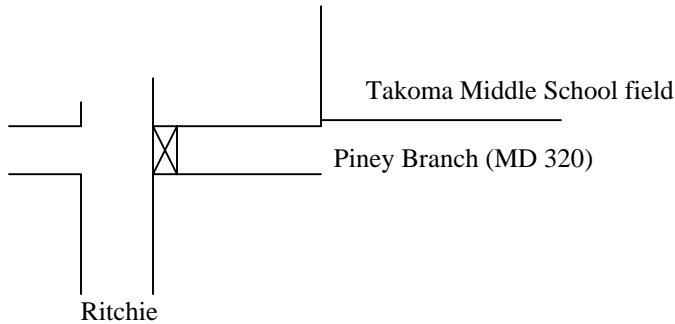
### Recommendations:

- Install an on-demand APS for this crossing.
- Narrow Piney Branch Road's middle lane and eliminate the right-turn lane. This would provide more space to extend the existing sidewalk or build a sidewalk on the opposite side. Eliminating the right turn lane would also force cars to make sharper, slower right turns onto Philadelphia. Push back the stop marks on Philadelphia so trucks and buses can make the right turn from Piney Branch.
- Include two-foot wide islands on Piney Branch and Philadelphia at their intersection. Islands this size can slow down traffic. Note that these islands would not buffer pedestrians in the middle of the street due to their small size.

### Action Step:

- Write a letter request to SHA.
- Work to decrease lanes may be combined with a Safe Routes to School sidewalk request.

## Ritchie and Piney Branch



**6. Issue:** The crossing on Piney Branch Road by Ritchie Avenue is wide and the crosswalk is not very visible to approaching vehicles despite the existing signage. There are two bus stops there and the crosswalk is also frequently used by parents and children going to the fields across the street, especially during the weekend.

### **Recommendations:**

- Install crosswalk paddles, weather strips, and/or an on-demand signal of flashing yellow lights.
- Narrow Piney Branch to two 14' lanes by installing an island, bump outs, or tapered edge lines.

### **Action Step:**

- Write a letter requesting the change to SHA.

**7. Issues:** The streetscape of Piney Branch contributes to the consistent speeding of vehicles and the lack of shade on the sidewalks.

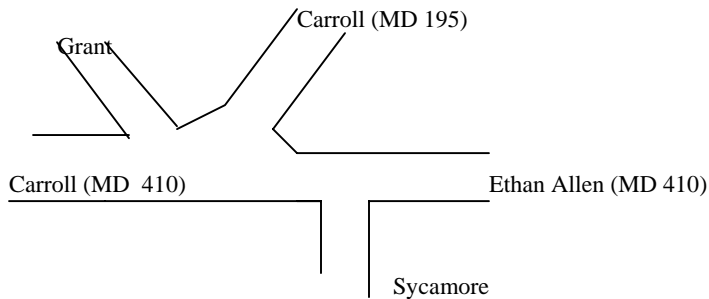
### **Recommendation:**

- Add vertical elements to the streetscape by planting trees. The trees will act as a buffer between the sidewalk and the street and shade pedestrians.

### **Action Step:**

- Work with the City Arborist and SHA to improve the tree canopy.

## II. Takoma Junction



Takoma Junction hosts a cluster of serious impediments to pedestrians and bicyclists. The design of the intersection creates an unfriendly and unsafe environment due to wide street crossings and few crossing options. The current traffic signal system is on a 4-phase light cycle that makes long waits for cars and pedestrians. This has resulted in dangerous crossing behavior from pedestrians and bicyclists who become impatient waiting for the correct time to cross. The light phasing has been reviewed by SHA who determined that the current timing is the most efficient possible given the intersection and congestion. The busy streets of the junction act as a dangerous barrier inbetween the Co-op and the shops along Carroll Avenue (MD 195) from Grant to Lee Avenue. There will be an opportunity for development on the City-owned lot between the Takoma Co-op and the Auto Clinic once the firestation project is completed. The entire commercial area is adjacent to single-family neighborhoods and two clusters of multi-family housing but this is not apparent in the level of pedestrian activity.

There are bus bays in the junction but it has been frequently observed that buses do not use them. In fact, Ride On's policy is to not pull out of traffic because the buses lose time re-entering the traffic flow. Also, the B.Y. Morrison Park was mentioned as being typically underutilized as it is separated from the businesses.

Workshop discussions revolved around ideas of how to make the Junction safer for shoppers, bicyclists, school children and seniors without decreasing the accessibility of the area or inhibiting a steady but safe flow of traffic. In addition, design changes to the roads can function as an asset to the businesses in the junction.

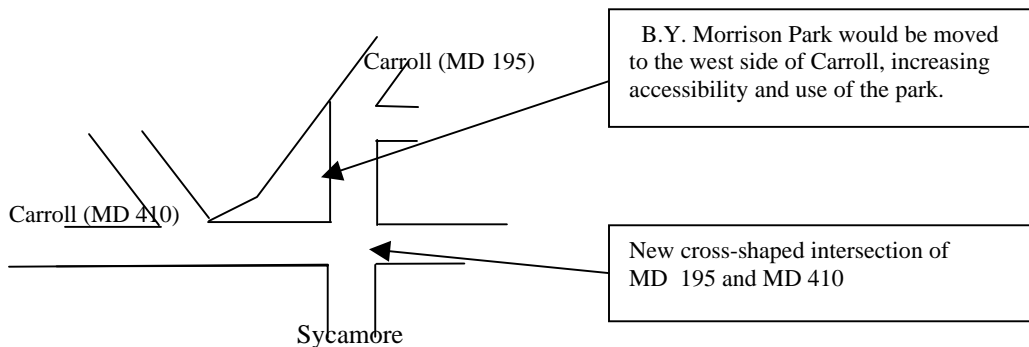
In a previous workshop in 2003, pedestrian expert Dan Burden recommended a roundabout which was reinforced by the City's Safe Roadways Committee. The council passed a resolution on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004 supporting the recommendation for this roundabout. The Walkable Communities Workshop produced many proposals including the installation of a roundabout as one of the main recommendations (see option b for Issue 1).

**1. Issues:** The junction is a busy intersection with wide street crossings, few crossing options and long waits. The Sycamore Avenue traffic light adds time to the signal phase but the street rarely has traffic. Furthermore, the area lacks the vitality and pedestrian activity that is its' potential as a unique commercial area.

## Main Recommendations

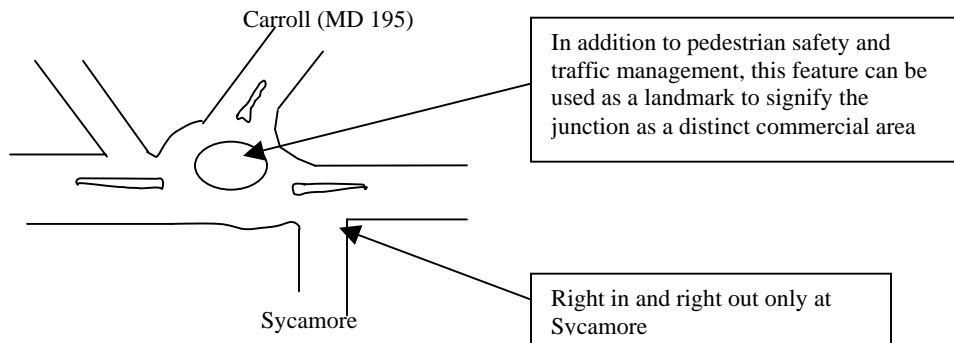
### a. Cross Intersection:

- Reorganize the streets by shifting Carroll (MD 195) east to create a cross-shaped intersection. This will:
  - Improve traffic flow
  - Make pedestrian crossings more intuitive
  - Reduce pedestrian crossing distances between commercial areas
  - Reduce the amount of time between walking signals
- Use a 3-phase cycle to remove the turning lanes on Carroll (MD 410) and (MD 195), narrow their crossing distances, improve the streetscape, and add on-street parking.



### **b. Roundabout:**

- Construct a roundabout with splinter islands.
- Widen the sidewalk on the north side of the intersection.
- Relocate the Morrison Gazebo and Takoma Park Mural.
- Landscape the roundabout and splinter islands.
- Convert Sycamore into right-in, right-out only at MD 410.
- Convert part of the turning lanes to streetscape, sidewalk and parking
- Have on demand lights for visually impaired pedestrians, or very narrow lanes to slow traffic speed to a rate that cars naturally yield to pedestrians.



### **Action Step:**

- Write a letter to SHA requesting a feasibility study on the two main recommendations.

**2. Issue:** Takoma Junction does not have strong visual boundaries to give it a sense of place or signify it as a destination.

### **Recommendations:**

- Signify the entrance into the junction as a unique area by beautifying the proposed roundabout or erecting gateway arches across MD 410 or public art on both sides of MD 410.
- Install a small landscaped roundabout near the intersection of Lee and Carroll.



- Install a second textured but not raised roundabout at Philadelphia and Carroll with textured splinter islands to accommodate the fire engines.

**Action Step:**

- Request changes in letter to SHA in combination with request for a roundabout.
- Lobby for the rest of Carroll to be funded through the Community Safety Enhancement Program.

**3. Issue:** Takoma Junction lacks sufficient pedestrian facilities.

**Recommendations:**

- Or widen sidewalk in front of Carroll Ave. shops to enable outdoor seating
- Use pavilion area for 1-2 licensed ‘pushcart’ vendors

**Action Steps:**

- Request funding to improve streetscape
- Approve licenses for 1-2 vendors

**4. Issue:** There is not enough parking in the area.

**Recommendations:**

- Put diagonal parking in front of Carroll Ave. shops.
- Underground parking

**Action Steps:**

- Include parking as a need in any request for reconfiguration of streets.
- Research the feasibility of a parking district

**5. Issue:** Car commuter traffic detracts from the residential neighborhoods

**Recommendations:**

- Use traffic calming measures such as narrow lanes and street trees and place identity measures such as public art so that commuters respect the neighborhood or choose alternative routes.

**Action Steps:**

- Continue to work with the City Arborist, City Gardener and Main Street Takoma to plan and implement traffic calming and beautification projects in the area.
- Recommend Takoma Junction for the SHA Community Safety Enhancement Program.

### **III. Flower Avenue and Piney Branch Road**

Flower Avenue (MD 787) is a main route in Takoma Park for Columbia Union College, Washington Adventist Hospital, and commercial and residential destinations. The intersection of Flower and Piney Branch Road (MD 320) is surrounded by four corners of busy retail with three of those corners having street front parking lots. Both roads have multiple bus routes resulting in many riders who walk across the intersection on a daily basis. The two most pedestrian unfriendly features are uneven and utility-cluttered sidewalks and the wide and poorly timed crossings.

**1. Issue:** The intersection is congested at all four points. Piney Branch is a wide crossing and its pedestrian signals do not give enough time to cross.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Move the stop bars further back from the crosswalks so cars do not crowd pedestrians towards the flow of traffic.
- Make the crosswalks more visible so that people are seen better at night. One possibility is in-pavement street lighting.
- Install Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS)
- Extend the walk phase to provide pedestrians sufficient time to cross.
- Install bumpouts that narrow the road at the intersection, shorten the crossing distance, and calm traffic.
- Prohibit left turns onto Piney Branch southbound from Flower Avenue. This would decrease the risk of automobile accidents and increase the safety of pedestrians crossing Piney Branch.

#### **Action Step:**

- Send a letter requesting these changes to SHA.

**2. Issue:** The sidewalk on the southwest corner of the intersection is narrow and full of obstructions and curb cuts.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Close off one or more of the curb cuts close to the intersection. These curb cuts make a discontinuous sidewalk for pedestrians and a dangerous entrance and exit for vehicles.
- Advocate for redevelopment that creates retail fronting a wide sidewalk and providing customer parking in the rear.

- Install a new sidewalk that meets ADA standards.
- Remove obstructions from the existing sidewalk.

**Action Steps:**

- Work with the SHA's Public Works department to see if any obstructions may be removed.
- Request sidewalk improvements from SHA.
- Require that all new developments install streetscape and build to the sidewalk with parking in the rear.
- Request sidewalk improvements.

#### **IV. Takoma/ Langley Park Crossroads**

The Crossroads has a history of being a dangerous area for pedestrians. There were 9 pedestrian injuries in 2004 and a fatality in the previous year. Busy shopping center parking lots and scores of pedestrians from bus stops and day laborer gatherings surround the intersection of University Blvd (MD 193) and New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650). The planned transit center will help consolidate bus traffic so riders do not have to walk long distances and cross New Hampshire and University for transfers. Since the plans are still in flux it was too early to estimate the center's impact on pedestrian safety. Many of the recommendations have a better chance of being realized if the City staff and citizens can work closely with the SHA, CASA, property owners, and the Crossroads Development Authority Multi Jurisdictional Pedestrian Safety Committee.

**1. Issue:** Although there are designated crosswalks, pedestrians are crossing University and New Hampshire at many different angles and areas.

##### **Recommendations:**

- Re-configure the traffic lights to create a “scramble” intersection for pedestrians.
- Install pedestrian oriented wayfinding signs with maps for shops, bus stops, and safe crossings.
- Improve the safety of pedestrians coming from *Hampshire Plaza* (on the southwest corner of the crossroads) by shifting the stairs leading out of the plaza to line up with the crosswalk on New Hampshire Ave.
- Re-paint or install new crosswalks through plaza parking lots.
- Install a landscape buffer between the sidewalk and the curb.

##### **Action Steps:**

- Request changes through the SHA review process for the 193/650 project.
- Work with property owners and the Council to make private property improvements.
- Work with the Council and CDA to improve wayfinding in the area.

**2. Issue:** The crossroads is perceived as a high crime area.

##### **Recommendations:**

- Install pedestrian-scale lighting
- Involve local businesses in beautification programs and provide grant money to leverage for façade improvements
- Strengthen the communication structure between local businesses and City and County police.

- Install a landscape buffer with trees to beautify the area.
- Sponsor a Business Watch program through the ECD and Police Department
- Work with the City Arborist and SHA to improve the tree canopy.

**Action Steps:**

- Identify funding sources for streetscape improvements such as pedestrian scale lighting.
- Lobby for Council and County fund a façade improvement program for the area.

**3. Issue:** Although the crossroads is an intersection of two arterials, the dense population that is transit dependant has resulted in a heavy pedestrian use that is not accounted for in the area's auto-oriented design.

**Recommendations:**

- Modify slip lanes by sharpening the curves to slow down drivers. Slip curves allow drivers to take right turns at higher speeds and merge into traffic. While drivers are merging they are often looking over their shoulders and not looking in front of them where crosswalks lay.
- Widen sidewalks to 10 feet.

**Action Step:**

- Request changes through the 193/650 review process and work with property owners to obtain easements and right-of-entry.